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AUTHOR	Schultz, Jerelyn B.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To determine the effectiveness of local postsecondary advisory councils in Iowa, this two-phase study surveyed every Iowa postsecondary vocational instructor to identify programs utilizing local advisory councils, the composition of these councils, and names and addresses of leading council members. Phase 2 used a more detailed questionnaire designed to obtain data on council operating procedures, council functions, and council effectiveness. The phase 2 questionnaire was sent to 220 vocational instructors and 258 advisory council members. Among the findings of the study was that of the 439 postsecondary vocational programs responding to the phase 1 survey, 374 indicated they utilized a local advisory committee. A representative council contained ten members and was chaired by a professional school employee. Phase 2 questionnaire data indicated that most functions performed by 85 percent or more of the local councils were related to curriculum development and evaluation: developing objectives, identifying needed occupational skills, recommending content, determining course relevancy, reviewing projects for instruction value, identifying labor market needs, recommending employability standards, and evaluating programs. (Summary data tables are appended.) (LRA)

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EFFECTIVENESS OF POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCILS

Jerelyn B. Schultz
Iowa State University

Doug Watson
Des Moines Area Community College

Harlan Giese
Iowa Vocational Education Advisory Council

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Early proponents of vocational education recognized the importance of a close working relationship with business, industry, and labor. Surveys of local employment needs and informal efforts by school personnel to involve local emloyers were common approaches used to establish this relationship. The use of local advisory councils or committees to develop this linkage was recognized as early as 1913 with the passage of an Indiana law. It provided for the establishment of advisory committees for industrial, agricultural and domestic science programs (American Vocational Association, 1969).

Although the need for and value of local advisory councils were a part of the early philosophy of vocational education, they were used sparingly until the late 1950's. Several conditions and movements after World War II illustrate why there was a dramatic increase in uses of advisory councils: public control of education, shifts in value structure, growth in technology and the educational enterprise, and expressions of citizen involvement and participation (Cochran, Phelps, Cochran, 1979). These movements combined with dramatic changes in the role of the school - broader curriculum, expanded clientele, education for all youth, and increased costs - called for a new relationship between vocational education and the community.

Increased concern was expressed by state legislators, state boards of education, and state directors of vocational education for greater education/community cooperation. Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and New York passed legislaion mandating the establishment of local advisory councils. A permanent National Advisory Council on Vocational Education was established and state advisory councils were mandated as a condition for receiving vocational education funds. Federal legislation provided

further support for the use of vocational education advisory councils with the passage of the 1976 Vocational Education Amendments. Section 105 specifies that each school district receiving Federal aid for support of their vocational programs shall establish a local advisory council.

Numerous resources are available on how to establish and work with advisory councils (Cochran, Phelps, and Cochran, 1979; Ely, 1977; Nerden, 1977). Research on the functions, activities, and nature of local advisory councils has been conducted by Behymer (1977), Cochran, Phelps, and Shupin (1974), McInnis (1971), Olson (1970), and Vogler (1971). Fewer studies have been conducted which evaluate the effectiveness of local advisory councils. Danenburg, Keene, and Miller (1975) analyzed data from 275 council members and vocational educators in Florida. They found a discrepancy between perceptions of effectiveness and degree to which councils were performing activities indicative of effectiveness. A survey of 105 council members in Utah by Land (1971) supported the lack of agreement between actual practice and theoretical models of advisory council functions. Further research on the evaluation of advisory councils is needed.

Determining the effectiveness of local postsecondary advisory councils in Iowa was the purpose of this research. Specific objectives were:

1. To determine the number and structure of postsecondary advisory councils.
2. To obtain information on operating procedures utilized by these councils.
3. To ascertain council functions and perceptions of council effectiveness in carrying out these functions.

4. To study differences in perceptions of council effectiveness held by vocational instructors and council members and by vocational program areas.

Method

The survey was conducted in two stages or phases. Phase I involved a mailed postcard questionnaire to the instructor of every postsecondary vocational education program in Iowa. This questionnaire identified programs utilizing local advisory councils, composition of these councils, and names and addresses of leading council members. Data for Phase I were collected on 439 programs, 88% of all postsecondary vocational education programs in Iowa.

A more detailed questionnaire designed to obtain data on council operating procedures, council functions, and council effectiveness was developed. This was sent to a stratified random sample of programs indicating they had a local council on the Phase I questionnaire. The basis for stratification was vocational program area.

The Phase II questionnaire was sent to 220 vocational instructors and 258 advisory council members. There were fewer instructors than council members because the same instructor often taught in more than one program. Usable data were provided by 153 instructors and 164 council members. The distribution of the final sample by vocational program area was agriculture-47, business-25, health-61, home economics-12, office-49, trades and industry-115, and other areas-8.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze Phase I data and the information on council operating procedures and functions obtained during Phase II. Principal Components Factor Analysis was used to

extract initial perceived effectiveness factors. Factors with eigenvalues greater than .80 were returned. Resulting factors were rotated using Varimax procedures. Differences in perceived council effectiveness between council members and vocational instructors and among vocational program areas were analyzed using analysis of variance techniques.

Findings

Phase I

Of the 439 postsecondary vocational programs responding to the postcard survey, 374 indicated they utilized a local advisory council. A representative council contained 10 members and was chaired by a professional school employee. The composition of a typical council was two professional educators, three employers, one employee, one student, one parent, and the remainder having varied other backgrounds. The majority of the councils met once or twice per year.

Phase II

Data from the Phase II questionnaire were divided into three broad categories: operating procedures, council functions, and council effectiveness.

Operating procedures. Data on operating procedures were divided into two subcategories, "appointment and service" and "council operation and administration." Findings on operating procedures for both groups of respondents (instructors and council members) are reported.

Selected "appointment and service" characteristics of postsecondary advisory councils are presented in Table 1. An examination of these findings indicates that instructors and council members generally agreed on the average term for council members, average length of council meetings, and the advanced notification of meeting received by council members.

They also responded similarly with respect to the number of males and females on their local councils.

Insert Table 1 here

The appointment, orientation, and recognition procedures followed by local councils are summarized in Table 2. Over one half of the instructors and almost one half of the council members indicated that the vocational director or coordinator appointed advisory council members. Both groups of respondents agreed that the two most common methods used to select the council chairperson were election by the council or assumption by the instructor.

Insert Table 2 here

Orientation procedures questions asked respondents to indicate the technique used to orient new members and the topics included in the orientation. Oral presentation was the most frequently utilized technique. Instructors and council members disagreed on whether or not any orientation was provided. Both groups responded that program goals, council role, and council goals were the topics most often included in the orientation.

Two questions provided an indication of the recognition councils and council members received. The first dealt with individual(s) to whom council recommendations were forwarded and the second concerned the method(s) used to recognize council members. Both instructors and

council members responded that recommendations usually were forwarded to the vocational director or coordiniator. Letters of thanks were used most frequently to recognize council members' efforts.

Operating and administrative procedures followed by postsecondary advisory councils in Iowa are presented in Table 3. It should be noted that there was a general lack of activities relative to the administration and operation of councils. With the exception of uniform length of appointment for council members, less than 50% of the respondents in both groups indicated the activities occurred. This indicates a need for councils to strengthen their operating and administrative procedures and to include more formalized procedures in the council organization.

Insert Table 3 here

Council functions. The extent to which postsecondary advisory councils were involved in 23 common council functions are found in Table 4. Most functions performed by 85% or more of the local councils were related to curriculum development and evaluation: developing objectives, identifying needed occupational skills, recommending content, determining course relevancy, reviewing projects for instructional value, identifying labor market needs, recommending employability standards, and evaluating programs. Other functions often performed were establishing cooperative relationships between school and industry and keeping instructors informed of new methods used in the trade or occupation.

Insert Table 4 here

Instructors and council members generally agreed on council involvement in the functions mentioned above. Wide differences were found between the two gorups of respondents for two student-related functions, recruitment of students and placement of graduates. Instructors responded more often than council members that local councils performed these functions.

Council effectiveness. Percentages of instructors and council members regarding council effectiveness were factor analyzed. Four effectiveness clusters resulted: I, Planning and evaluating programs; II, Developing curriculum; III, Placing students; and IV, Promoting programs. The four factors accounted for 88.9% of the total variance. Reliabilities of the factors calculated using the Spearman Brown procedure were .96, .93, .70, and .83 respectively.

Items included in each factor, item loadings, percent of variance accounted for, and factor means are presented in Table 5. Inspection of the factor mean scores indicates that postsecondary advisory council members and instructors perceived councils as ineffective with respect to Factor I, neither effective nor ineffective for Factors III and IV, and slightly effective for Factor II. Perceptions about the relative ineffectiveness of Iowa's postsecondary vocational education advisory councils are similar to those found by Danenburg, Keene, and Miller (1975) in Florida, by Land (1971) in Utah, and by McInnis (1971) in Washington.

Insert Table 5 here

Differences in effectiveness perception. The final objective for the study was to study differences in perceptions of council effectiveness among vocational education program areas and between position of the respondent, instructor or council member. F-ratios resulting from the two-way analyses of variance using program area and position of respondent as sources of variance are presented in Table 6. No significant interactions were found between program area and position of respondent. Factor mean scores by program and by position were inspected to interpret significant F-ratios.

Insert Table 6 here

Program area was a significant source of variance for Factors II and III. In both instances home economics advisory councils were perceived as most effective and health advisory councils as least effective. Average item scores for Factor II by program area were 3.61 for agriculture, 3.55 for business, 3.03 for health, 3.85 for home economics, 3.62 for office, and 3.51 for trades and industry. With the exception of health all the other program areas considered postsecondary councils to be in the effective range of the scale on functions related to curriculum development. Factor III average item scores were agriculture 3.01, business 3.24, health 2.61, home economics 3.86, office 2.98, and trades and industry 2.70. Home economics councils were perceived as being effective in placing students while health, trades and industry, and office councils were perceived as having somewhat ineffective performance in this area.

These differences need to be interpreted cautiously because of the extremely unequal cell sizes.

Position of respondent was a significant source of variance for only one factor, IV. Instructors considered advisory councils to be significantly more effective than council members in promoting programs. Average item scores were 3.22 for instructors and 2.90 for council members.

Implications

Several implications on the quality of existing postsecondary vocational education advisory councils and the preservice and inservice education needed for local advisory councils to be effective can be drawn from the results of this study. The first implication arises from the infrequency of council meetings and the informal approach utilized to conduct council meetings. These findings reveal a need for local councils to strengthen their "operational" activities. Secondly, many councils are not performing functions indicative of an effective council. In the instances where they are performing these functions, their efforts are generally not considered to be very effective. The ineffectiveness of these efforts may be a reflection of inadequate orientation to the roles and functions of advisory councils.

The final implication is relate to the need for more direction at the state level, either from the state department of education, the state advisory council, or teacher training institutions. Assistance is needed in developing a model operational design for all vocational education program areas. Respondents indicated they would like

assistance in the form of newsletters and/or handbooks. These would provide a common core of information for all vocational education councils and could serve to highlight effective local councils. Many local councils are not making the impact on local programs they could if they performed effectively more of the functions specified in Public Law 94-482.

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Table 1

Selected Appointment and Service Characteristics of Postsecondary Advisory Councils

Characteristic	Instructors		Council Members	
	Mean	S.D.[a]	Mean	S.D.
Term (years)	3.0	1.0	3.3	1.9
Meeting length (hours)	2.3	.8	2.3	.9
Meeting notification (days)	17.8	11.6	16.9	12.7
Male members	6.5	1.2	7.0	3.9
Female members	5.5	2.5	4.7	3.2

[a]S.D. refers to standard deviation.

Table 2

Postsecondary Advisory Council Appointment, Orientation, and Recognition Procedures

Procedure	% of Instructors	% of Council Members
Council appointed by:		
vocational director	56	47
instructor	24	15
council	11	17
other	9	21
Chairperson is:		
elected by council	47	35
assumed by instructor	39	32
appointed by instructor/ vocational director	12	20
other	12	13
Council oriented by:		
oral presentation	58	46
handbook distribution	17	10
audiovisual presentation	4	5
no orientation	21	39
Orientation includes:		
program goals	66	51
council role	65	43
council goals	47	41
council activities	43	26
vocational education goals	41	37
school goals	37	32
legislation	9	9
Recommendations forwarded to:		
vocational director	73	60
school administrator	12	13
instructor	8	12
board of education	1	2
not forwarded	6	10
Members recognized by:		
letters of thanks	65	54
certificates/awards	44	16
special events	12	9
news releases	7	4
other	9	12

Table 3

Postsecondary Advisory Council Operating and Administrative Procedures

Procedure	Instructors			Council Members		
	% yes	% no	% don't know	% yes	% no	% don't know
Board authorization	4	76	20	2	50	48
Official appointment notification	14	81	5	6	90	4
Uniform appointment length	51	44	5	36	36	28
Staggered terms	36	59	5	30	32	38
Written agenda distributed	8	91	1	13	84	3
Minutes kept	2	97	1	4	86	10
Minutes acted on	29	67	2	28	62	10
Minutes filed with administration	10	80	10	4	34	62
Recommendations forwarded	30	58	12	15	52	34
Members recognized	18	75	7	10	68	22

Table 4

Functions of Postsecondary Advisory Councils

Functions	% of Instructors	% of Council Members
Recommend content	98	90
Determine course relevancy	97	91
Identify needed skills	97	89
Recommend employability standards	95	87
Identify labor market needs	95	87
Link school and industry	93	88
Inform instructors of new methods	93	85
Review projects	93	84
Evaluate programs	89	92
Communicate with community	89	76
Place graduates	89	69
Develop objectives	87	90
Advise on equipment, etc.	87	86
Recruit students	85	66
Establish course sequence	82	77
Plan facilities	65	64
Select materials	63	69
Identify training sites	63	67
Eliminate sex bias	61	58
Develop continuing education	57	43
Assist in follow-up	56	53
Advise on budget	54	52
Plan for special needs students	48	51

Table 5

Item loadings, percent of variance, and factor means for postsecondary advisory council effectiveness factors

Item	Loading	% of Variance	Mean[a]
I. Planning and evaluating programs		52.9	2.04
Assist in follow-up	.56		
Plan facilities	.41		
Select materials	.68		
Plan for special needs students	.66		
Eliminate sex bias	.62		
Evaluate programs	.46		
Advise on budget	.46		
Develop continuing education	.65		
II. Developing curriculum		17.1	3.48
Develop objectives	.73		
Establish course sequence	.65		
Identify needed skills	.63		
Recommend content	.55		
Determine course relevancy	.70		
Recommend employability standards	.60		
III. Placing students		12.5	2.86
Identify labor market needs	.50		
Place graduates	.67		
Identify training sites	.72		
IV. Promoting programs		6.4	3.06
Recruit students	.54		
Communicate with community	.57		
Link school and industry	.73		
Inform instructors of new methods	.40		

[a]Mean scores could range from 1.00, very dissatisfied, to 5.00, very satisfied.

Table 6

F-ratios for Program Area and Position as Related to Postsecondary Advisory Council Effectiveness

Factor	F-ratios			
	Overall	Program	Position	Program Position Interaction
I. Planning and evaluating programs	1.61	1.67	1.25	.58
II. Developing curriculum	2.75**	3.13**	.67	.71
III. Placing students	2.59**	2.73*	1.49	.61
IV. Promoting programs	1.67	.93	6.46*	1.69

*Significant at $p<0.05$.

**Significant at $p<0.01$.